

MCC Committee on Women's Concerns report



Report #52, November-December 1983

Focus on Women and Aging: Now Let Us Tell of Anna the Prophet

by Muriel Thiessen Stackley

I am drawn to you, Anna the Prophet. (I am constitutionally unable to call you just "Anna." I am about half your Luke-2 age.)

I am drawn to you as I would be to an older sister. The name of your progenitor, Asher, means "happy." Perhaps a case can be made for joy being in your genetic inheritance—and what else but joy could have sustained you in those years of no-doubt-spartan existence in the temple! The record states that you did not depart from the temple (the outer court, I understand, beyond which the women could not go).

I like the translation (RSV) that describes your age as being "great"; you were a woman of "great age." I am free to editorialize: you were a woman of tremendous age, of to-be-admired age, to-be-sought-after age.

But the aloneness. You may well have been alone for upwards of sixty years when we meet you in Luke 2. I remember pondering that my mother-in-law had been a widow longer than she had been married—and she had been married for thirty years, compared to your seven. Was it joy that kept you going? Expectation?

You worshipped "with fasting and prayer," the record states, "day and night," looking for the redemption of Jerusalem. And because you were there so steadfastly, you were there in that two-pigeon moment when tiny Jesus was brought to the temple.

Because you knew what you had been fasting and praying for, recognition was immediate—immediate and convincing enough to draw the attention of all "who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem." The word apparently got through to the males cloistered in the inner court and the holy of holies!

What you say to me, Anna the Prophet, is: consider a commitment to "being there," year in, year out, fasting and praying, worshipping, waiting, believing that God is revealed again and again.

Worship and waiting and work are of a piece—one. When the revelation comes—as it does repeatedly—I will

be thus at the right place at the right time. I will recognize God's revelation because I know what I am waiting for. That staying power is what you teach me. I am beginning to comprehend it.

What you remind me of, Anna the Prophet—you and those whose writing follows this—is the goodness of living long enough to look back and see clearly the presence and actions of God. For that reminder, I thank you.

This Report was compiled by Muriel Thiessen Stackley, free-lance writer from Lincoln, Nebraska, and a former editor of the Report. Muriel writes that in the two symposia which make up the bulk of this issue, "some who know me will sniff out the India connection. . . . We can learn from Indians and their ilk—where the older you are the more respected you are."

Muriel has also supplied the poem below and the others interspersed throughout this issue.

Surprise

*O day that brings a glad surprise,
We greet you with welcome in our eyes;
When friends and family with us meet,
We feel the strong ties of fellowship, sweet
In all our hopes of meeting again
To share the joys of now and then;
We feel the power of long-time ties,
Bringing the love-light into our eyes—
O, these are blessings we prize!*

—Adah B. Wenger, Goshen, Indiana

Symposium I: Ten People Reflect On— Experiencing Aging

#1—Bertha Beachy

My perceptions of the aging process relate directly to my Amish background, twenty years in Africa, long-living parents and singleness.

As a child I experienced the changing seasons, the animals on the farm, my extended family and the church community. We rejoiced with a new birth, joyed in older people and participated in death naturally. Each part of the life cycle was valued and enjoyed.

Both grandmothers died before I was ten. My favorite grandfather always arrived from Ohio with a gift just for me and spent time talking, holding and walking with me. Early on I suspected that my other grandfather did not know my name—who *would* be able to name 80 grandchildren that he seldom saw? But I am still warmed 20 years later by his love of books, awareness of the world and spiritual concerns.

My African friends rejoiced in this big Amish tribe of mine. They knew I would always be well cared for. They also listened to the stories of grandparents and memorized oral genealogies. They always reserved the place of honor for the grayheads and listened to the wisdom of the experienced. It is painful to tell my African friends that my own parents of 88 and 91 are now in a nursing home.

The reality of that family decision forces me to be very aware of my present style of living: I am now becoming what I will be more of later! I struggle for more reflection and personal space in a busy schedule. If I follow the family pattern, at 52 I am just over the first half of my life.

I celebrate each birthday with joy and a special gift for myself. As a single person, I do not expect to be remembered or to live on in children as my married friends do. All I have is the present moment.

I will not pass this way again, and that makes each opportunity and day a gift. If death comes tomorrow, I know that I have lived fully and dangerously with few regrets. For this I give thanks!

Bertha Beachy, Goshen, Indiana, manages a Provident Bookstore, spent 20 years in East Africa, is an elder at the Assembly Mennonite Church and just finished three years on the Committee on Women's Concerns.

#2—Helene Wiens Dick

As a young woman I would have thought, "How awful to be 74 years old." But it isn't so bad!

At that time in Chicago I taught Sunday school and summer Bible school, led choir and played piano at the Mennonite Bible Mission. Now I don't do any of those

things. No one asks me to do the first three anymore, and our present organ has several keys off-pitch.

When our eight children were young I baked whole wheat bread, then discontinued it for some years. Now my husband and I are back at it again, grinding wheat berries in our own stone grinder. We also eat freshly ground wheat with raw top milk for our breakfast cereal. We usually have raw fruit on our kitchen table—not for decoration! We feel we must feed our bodies the best we can.

Since I still want to be useful, I babysit our granddaughter twice a week; work in a nursing home one night a week; go to Summerfield, Illinois, every weekend with my minister husband; attend conferences, reunions and homecomings; discuss people's problems via phone, mail and face-to-face; read novels, biographies and Mennonite periodicals.

We have no one in college anymore, but frugal habits persist. Suitable dresses can be bought at Mennonite Thrift Shop in Bloomington for \$2.50. George looks neat in his \$7.00 suit. Birthday greetings may be on the back of typing paper, faced with an appropriate picture cut from a magazine. We appreciate that we can share in giving to General Conference and MCC services.

As always, we still run into problems, indecisions, suffering. But, as in days gone by, we try to listen to God, who is right here. It's not so bad being 74.

Helene Wiens Dick, Bloomington, Illinois, has also lived in Lima, Ohio; Bloomfield, Montana; Winton, California (where she taught school); and Gulfport, Mississippi.

#3—Lydia Ewert

I wonder. When does aging set in? When familiar names don't flash instantly on the memory, the "Deep Heating" bottle empties faster on the arthritic joints, driving is better during the day, the overheated skillet gets buckled? If that's true, then I'm old.

Right now I'm rejoicing over my second victory over cancer. I continue to enjoy housekeeping. But much more, what is happening in the world occupies much of my thought, actions and prayer life.

Out of a sense of responsibility I thrive on extensive reading: *Sojourners*, *The Other Side*, *Progressive*, *There Is a River* by Harding, *The Third Wave* by Toffler, *A Full Life* by Douglas, *Black Like Me* by Griffin, the poetry of Gibran, *El Salvador in Transition* by Baloyra, and so many more.

I am heartened by new life in the church. So many little colonies of heaven are sprouting all over. But I'm disturbed by the materialism among us that cripples the Good News. Even more, I'm distressed over my

government's obsession with military power and world domination. I send frequent messages to Washington because of this concern.

I find real relaxation in sewing little garments from remnants for relief. The total is nearing the thousand mark. How I'd love to see a little girl in one of these dresses.

My life has been made full and given direction by an Anabaptist heritage, the diaries of a father and grandfather, and the experiences of World Wars I and II.

Ehrman's "Take kindly to the counsel of the years" must continue to be my motto. I do admit some worry about excessive cost of health care and possible dependency in a care home.

Lydia Ewert, Hillsboro, Kansas, age 81, is retired from high school teaching and rural living. Her family includes a husband, two daughters, nine grandchildren and one great-grandchild.

#4—Thelma Miller Groff

Most of the time I don't feel old, although I know I am now old. And I wouldn't exchange my stage of life for another. I'm glad to be here. That doesn't say, however, that "it's all roses" or that I always handle it well.

One of my bothersome limitations is not remembering names. I get them almost right through my way of associating but often that is not accurate enough. When my husband and I went to purchase a VW Rabbit, I told the salesman that we were looking for a Carrot.

I want to consciously try to pay close enough attention so that I do better in this. But I also want to accept this as an all-right part of aging. It helps to remind myself that after 60 years my brain has a lot to sort through and remember. Then I feel I actually do a creditable job.

If I had it to do over, I would consider myself young enough to do whatever I really wanted to do. I would do this even if it involved several years of preparation. At 56 I decided to take a smattering of seminary courses rather than to aim for an MDiv degree. Now, four years later, some opportunities (jobs) are closed to me which I realize I still could handle. If I had let my heart be my guide, I might have decided differently.

At this age I treasure my growing sense of oneness with all persons and my slowly growing attraction to life after death. I think more of the exciting possibilities that are open to me and all of us then!

Three years ago at a journaling workshop I wrote the piece printed here.

Thelma Miller Groff, Goshen, Indiana, is on the pastoral staff for students at Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminaries.

Now: The Open Moment

*I search for the movement of my inner life
In the reflection of my underground stream.
I look. I wait. I listen. I hear:*

"Accept your growing-older reflection."

I pause. I do. And with more kindness than before.

I listen again. I hear:

"Let those you meet know of your inner oneness with them, of your goodwill for and trust in them.

Let your presence invite out the best in them even as you let them do that for you."

I listen again and I hear:

"There are inner rumblings within you which may distort the surface reflection."

I respond, "That is all right. I will be open to them."

I hear the warning, "The growing awareness of these simmering eruptions may begin to thunder in your being. They may explode."

I respond, "That, too, is all right for the Source of my inner well is constant, vast, and Quietness itself."

—Thelma Miller Groff

#5—Ruth Fisher

Aging is the one thing I have in common with everyone on this earth. Perhaps that is the reason I didn't give it much thought until I began thinking about retiring. Because of observations I'd made, I chose to retire while I was doing my work well—before someone could say, "Will she ever quit?"

Last January seemed the ideal time. In preparation I read everything I could find on aging, attended many seminars, and felt quite informed.

But I was not prepared for the lonely feeling I had on the Monday morning I awoke unemployed, with no appointments on my calendar. I'd grown up with the Mennonite tradition to work and not waste time. For many, this has been the key to success and is a reputation of which Mennonites need not be ashamed. However, to unlearn this tradition after becoming a senior citizen—a label I haven't learned to appreciate—is not easy.

I'm finding it difficult to spend a morning over a cup of coffee listening to a friend or an afternoon with a group and not feel guilty because I haven't been "working". Much of my work was talking to people, but my conversations were always motivated to make them feel better. I am now learning to know people who were acquaintances before. I now have time to listen and my mind is open to what they are saying.

Aging is exciting for the first time in my life; I'm on my own and not accountable to anyone at any given time. It is a new way of life which does not include alarm clocks ringing in the morning or traveling to meetings. The welcome mat is always out. If you travel my way, stop in for a cup of tea.

Ruth Fisher, Kalona, Iowa, worked for MCC six years in China and Taiwan, then directed the Eye Bank at University Hospitals, University of Iowa, for 27 years.

#6—Clara Esch Headrick

Having always been the “baby” in my family and having just lost my 96-year-old mother this year, it was hard for me to think that I would be asked to write something on aging!

However, my gray hair and adult children prove that I am definitely past the half-century mark. The past five years have been so rich in my spiritual journey I wouldn’t choose to be a bit younger. I have no reason to believe my walk with God won’t continue to be fulfilling.

Some time ago I found the treasure of verses 12-14 in Psalm 92 during my Bible study:

*The righteous will flourish like palm trees;
They will grow like cedars of Lebanon.
They are like trees planted in the house of the Lord,
that flourish in the Temple of our God,
That still bear fruit in old age,
and are always green and strong. (TEV)*

To me that is a promise from the Lord who is “supreme forever” (v.8).

To “bear fruit” is what I’m counting on as I grow older. The type of fruit has changed. Instead of keeping up with a household of eight, I now have time alone to write letters, study or pray. I have the freedom to go visiting without consulting family plans. I sew comforter tops for WMSC rather than Pep Club outfits!

Ecclesiastes 7:8 says, “The end of something is better than its beginning.” This I am experiencing and my hope for future years is fixed on the God who is there at both ends of the spectrum.

Clara Esch Headrick, LaJunta, Colorado, describes herself as “much blessed daughter, sister, wife, mother, homemaker, nurse, but most importantly honored child of God.”

#7—Wilma Ewert Leichty

A 14-month bout of almost constant pain jolted me into the first conscious awareness of a body getting older. Aggravated by three minor accidents, an upper spinal degenerative condition produced severe pain whenever I performed even the simplest tasks, typed or wrote letters. It almost immobilized me at times. Walking even a short distance was agonizing.

Finally a friend directed me to a Pain Control Unit where I found the “tools” for preventing the “chronic pain cycle” after acute episodes occurred. Proper use of these “tools,” however, forced me into a totally different lifestyle. Previously, I had been employed, was active in church, enjoyed college or seminary classes, did volunteer work and considerable entertaining.

Now, a priority must be pain management—muscle-strengthening exercises, relaxation techniques (including frequent rests), general fitness (for me, lap-swimming regularly), good nutrition, emotional and spiritual health and avoidance of stress.

These activities in turn take considerable time away from church and volunteer activities, relationships and much-loved classwork. Often one is misunderstood for avoiding involvement. So a life of pain and pain management is a lonely life! One tends to become isolated, trying to cope, because it is so all-consuming.

But essentially, achieving wellness in this situation is no different than learning to make adjustments to other limiting experiences of life—maximizing the best moments, finding new interests and coming to peace with the realization of having been “put on the shelf” while still eager to be meaningfully involved in the learning experience called life.

Wilma Ewert Leichty, Elkhart, Indiana, and her husband Clarence enjoy housing seminary students in their home near Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminaries.

#8—Mariam Penner Schmidt

To me aging was not a sudden process—rather a very unconscious changing of values. I am not as interested in things anymore that I once thought to be very important. It’s not that you are 59 and then suddenly 65; it’s so gradual that you don’t realize what is going on.

I have had a husband who has been in the public eye. He is also extremely interested in the refugees in Paraguay. All this makes me more aware of the needs of others. It does not give me much time to think only of myself.

I have a supportive family which also helps the aging process. Good close friends are a great asset too. My grandchildren and great-grandchild keep me young. I am fortunate to have a wide variety of acquaintances all over the world—some back to my high school days. I have been corresponding with these many people, which also helps keep the mind alert.

I do a lot of reading, love to cook and entertain. I cannot visualize anyone cut off from all life—no friends, no books, no music—this is unbelievable to me! I have a feeling that when you get to be a little older and must use a cane, people tend to think your productive days are over. We in our 70’s and 80’s have much to give. We are still of use to many people.

I also feel that many times young people don’t realize that one day they too will be old. They need to learn to grow old along with everyone else. They need to know that we are not a “breed apart.”

Mariam Penner Schmidt, Newton, Kansas, retired teacher of foreign languages, was born in 1901 to the first General Conference Mennonite missionaries to India. She is married to Dr. Herbert R. Schmidt.

Age does not make us childish, as they say. It only finds us true children still—J.W. von Goethe, 1749-1832

#9—Viola Weidner

At 68 I'm busier than ever. I visit, listen, help and encourage. It isn't accurate to say, "I..." It is *we* (LeRoy and I together) who have chosen these activities for our years that are almost free from parenting and earning.

We read, study and teach. We take time to meditate, pray and worship. We keep house, do a little camping and a little traveling. Once in a while I write.

We always planned to do Voluntary Service when we were free. Now we know our VS assignment is right here in Allentown. It may not be as exciting as orientation for a new job and living in a new situation, but it is very rewarding.

Our most important goal is nurturing our grandchildren. Since most of them live too far away to drop in, much of our communication is through letter writing. We also find foster grandchildren in our church family who need grandparents as desperately as we need grandkids. So there is always someone to share a birthday, or take to a circus or to invite for holidays that are more fun when they are intergenerational.

David's prayer in Psalm 71:18 is also mine: "Now that I am old... O God, be with me while I proclaim your power and might to all generations to come" (TEV).

Viola Weidner, Allentown, Pennsylvania, is mother of four, grandmother of ten. She has been teaching church school classes at various age levels for 50 years.

#10—Irene Weaver

At this time of my life when the most active years of my pilgrimage are behind me, I have an overflowing sense of gratitude for memories. At 73 I have more time to remember the gemstones of experience along this pilgrimage.

My memories take me from the heights of the Himalayas to the deep sands of the Kalahari; from the lush flora of West Africa to the thornbush of Botswana; from the seacoasts of Ghana to the inland haunts of Upper Volta; from the rolling hills of Swaziland to the rocky heights of Lesotho.

Life unfolded so rapidly for me, I know I could never remember as I ought. So long, long ago I asked God to keep the memories of these experiences in God's archives—and to please give them back to me when I was to share them with others.

God has done this over the years, and continues to do so today. It is one of the rewarding day-to-day experiences I have. I am comforted to know that my memories are in God's safekeeping. Each day I am more aware of how indebted I am to God for such a pilgrimage.

Just now I am remembering that 50 years ago this month, on September 9, Ed and I stood on a Kashmiri rug at the Adelphian Rockery on the Goshen College

campus, where my father married us and gave us his blessing. What a breath-taking 50 years have followed.

"Thank you, God, for memories in our later years—memories that are rooted in the past but give us wings of faith for the future."

Irene Weaver, Hesston, Kansas, offspring of missionaries, is herself a retired missionary and feels a belonging to "God's church around the world."



My winter will be good

*Life's autumn days are bright and clear,
But wintertime is almost here.
Winter is a white time,
A lonely, brooding, quiet time
Of freshly fallen snow.
A skies of darkening gray time,
A long night and shorter daytime
With deepening sunset glow.
Bleak days of bitter cold,
Bare, leafless trees etched bold
Against the evening sky.
Sharp chill of blustering winds
But warmth, too, of fireside and friends.
And green—the evergreen of fir and pine
And stately cedar in the silent wood;
The latent green of leafbud
Still hidden now from human eye.
My winter will be good—brave and serene,
With the assurance of new life again.*

—Amelia Mueller, Halstead, KS

Symposium II: Five Gerontologists Speak . .

. . .On the Inter-Mennonite Council On Aging

As program director for the Inter-Mennonite Council on Aging, I am concerned about the increasing proportion of older persons in our churches.

Church data indicate that those 65 and over now constitute up to 25% of the church/synagogue constituency (22% in the General Conference Mennonite Church). By 2030 up to half of church members are likely to be older persons. Already up to 50% of church members in some denominations are age 50 and over (43% in the General Conference). The fastest growing group of older persons is those over 85. These are more likely to be the "frail" elderly.

Women constitute about 3/5 of those 65 plus, and almost half of older women live alone. The average age of widowhood is 56; 2/3 of widows live alone. Also, 75% of the elderly who live below the poverty line are women. So both poverty and aging are issues of significant concern for women.

Many women in their 50's and 60's now find themselves in a complex family situation. They may be working full-time after years of raising a family, and now face the social and psychological changes involved in approaching retirement.

Meanwhile they may have elderly parents in their 80's and 90's for whom they are major caregivers; their spouse may be ill or deceased or also approaching retirement; they may themselves be facing health problems. Also, their adult children are still in the early years of family life and may look to their parents for financial support and grandparenting. These women feel trapped in the middle of all these complex demands.

As families scatter, the church will need to play an ever more important role in the lives of older persons. It will be a challenge for the church to plan appropriate involvement, utilizing the wisdom and experience of this significant and growing segment of their membership.

Successful Aging: Factors

More than 50% of older persons have available four things that contribute to successful aging, according to Dr. Herbert H. Shore of Dallas, Oregon. These factors are: reasonably good health, adequate financing, activities and interests and a support group of family, friends, neighbors or church.

Most are the "elderly" who live an active life—about 15% are the "go-go" aged who are still rushing about with busy schedules or employment at age 80; about 35% are the "well-go" who still do most of the things they wish. The next 25% are the "slow-go" group who manage quite well with the services available to them—although they may have intermittent or recurrent episodes of illness.

Then come the 10% of "slow-slow" whom Dr. Shore calls the "walking wounded." They need a support

group in the church or other assistance, but they are often overlooked if they do not ask for help. Finally, the last 15% or "no-no" aged are the frail, fragile, or vulnerable, including the 5% living in institutions plus the 10% receiving care from family or friends while confined to their homes.

Churches can assist by planning more intergenerational activities, by involvement in wholistic health and wellness programs, by midlife planning, by awareness of gaps in community services and efforts to fill the gaps.

What are the needs and how will the churches respond? The search for appropriate answers should be underway in each church.

Martha F. Graber, North Newton, Kansas

. . .On a Mennonite Board of Missions Survey

In 1977 I completed my Masters' thesis on the involvement of home economists with elderly persons. I then realized I had something to offer those in this age group.

In 1980 I volunteered to assist persons over 65 in our Ohio congregation in filling out a four-page questionnaire developed by Tilman Smith at Mennonite Board of Missions. Since spending those hours individually with these persons, I have felt a special closeness to them. Our times together were made meaningful by listening, questioning and learning from each other.

The purpose was to gather demographic data, as well as information on the gifts and needs of these persons. The questionnaire also invited opinions on ways in which seniors and the congregation can become more mutually involved and supportive. I made a total of 22 visits, each one lasting from ½ to 2½ hours.

Here are some discoveries I made:

1) Most of our senior citizens did not have many unmet needs, and all hesitated to share any, being "good Mennonites." However, neither did they perceive themselves to have many resources to share. These church members were thankful they could do their own work, but felt they had no extra time or energy to give. It is significant to note that most of these persons had other family members in the community.

2) The one thing most desired by our older persons was visits. Many also expressed their love of playing games.

3) Many persons identified a basic fear for the future—they didn't want to be a burden or become dependent on anyone now or later. They feared not being able to take care of themselves.

MBM used the results of the surveys; they have been summarized elsewhere. The most significant benefit for us was in the process. My visit was important—each

person received my homemade rolls and some individual attention.

I gained too. I value the plant starts, the lunch, the fresh grape juice, the chestnuts; but most of all the relationships that were established.

There are many ways a congregation can become more involved with the lives of its senior citizens. A beginning list is included below.

Ginny Birky, Cortez, Colorado

...On Ways to Connect: Seniors and Congregation

- 1) Visit—play games, listen.
- 2) Invite single senior citizens for meals.
- 3) Take a loaf of bread or pie to a widower.
- 4) Establish a foster grandparent/grandchild program.
- 5) Young married Sunday School class families can sign up to help a certain person with periodic jobs—i.e., snow removal or window washing.
- 6) MYF can sponsor a senior citizen table game night or play games in the homes of older persons on a Sunday afternoon.
- 7) Suggest small ways elderly persons can contribute to the life of the congregation in an ongoing way—i.e., bring orange juice for a kindergarten class once a month.
- 8) Establish a monthly senior citizen carry-in meal.
- 9) Request senior citizens to do specific tasks for the vacation Bible school program—i.e., be in charge of matching up and in forming Prayer Partners or babysitters.

Ginny Birky

...On Stereotypes

At times it is difficult to discern our ministry with longer-living people. We think in stereotypes. There is a tendency to think all older people have impaired judgment and diminished intellectual functioning as well as an inability to change. These stereotypes are often inaccurate. Longer-living people have a wealth of experience and few have the profound disabilities that have been placed on them.

Thus, we must examine our "ageism." One explanation for our prejudices toward longer-living people is our own fear of infirmity and of our own mortality. We become "caught up" with our youth-oriented culture and deny our own aging process.

We have all ages within the kingdom, and we are all part of the Body of Christ. If we deny a part of the Body, all of us will suffer. We need the discernment of our longer-living sisters and brothers, and we need to be sensitive to their needs.

Many of our longer-living women have served very faithfully in the way they understood their role. Roles were stereotyped and few options were available for service. Many of these women were very creative in their prescribed roles and worked around many barriers. They were faithful servants.

Today some of us feel a need to change these stereotyped roles in order to be faithful as we now understand this. Let us not forget those who preceded us as we continue the process of change.

JoAnn Meyer Burke, Hatfield, Pennsylvania

...On Finding and Maintaining Hope

For the past two years I have been enrolled in the doctoral program in nursing at Rush University in Chicago. My specialty is mental health and gerontology. I have been fortunate to have had clinical experiences in an acute psychiatric setting and also in a community mental health setting.

I find I am most interested in older persons who remain in their homes; my work focuses upon helping them to solve some of their everyday problems.

Hope is an essential element. It determines how persons deal with their life situation. While we often think of Christian hope in relationship to life in the hereafter, I have found that hope also has to be experienced on a day-to-day basis. Therefore as I work with older persons, my primary focus is to assist them to find or maintain hope.

I saw one woman for six months who had every reason to feel hopeless. She had Parkinson's disease and was also recovering from a stroke. Three days after her stroke her alcoholic husband took his life. Throughout their marriage this couple had taken care of his father, her mother and an aunt. Their only child died at age seven. They had often commented to each other that when they become old there would be no one to care for them. Now Mrs. Fowler found herself alone, sick and with dwindling finances.

Helping her to find hope was not always easy. She needed an opportunity to express anger toward her husband for leaving her at such a time. She needed to cry about what the loss of her daughter meant to her now that she was older and alone. She also needed help in finding ways to be self-sufficient in her home. Making a sandwich from a wheelchair was not easy in her small kitchen.

Finding and maintaining her hope involved a number of approaches. We looked at her internal resources, the support she gained from others and her support from God. She had participated in Al Anon earlier in life, and often referred to the Serenity Prayer. On her not-so-good days she would say, "All I ask for today is 'God grant me the serenity. . .'"

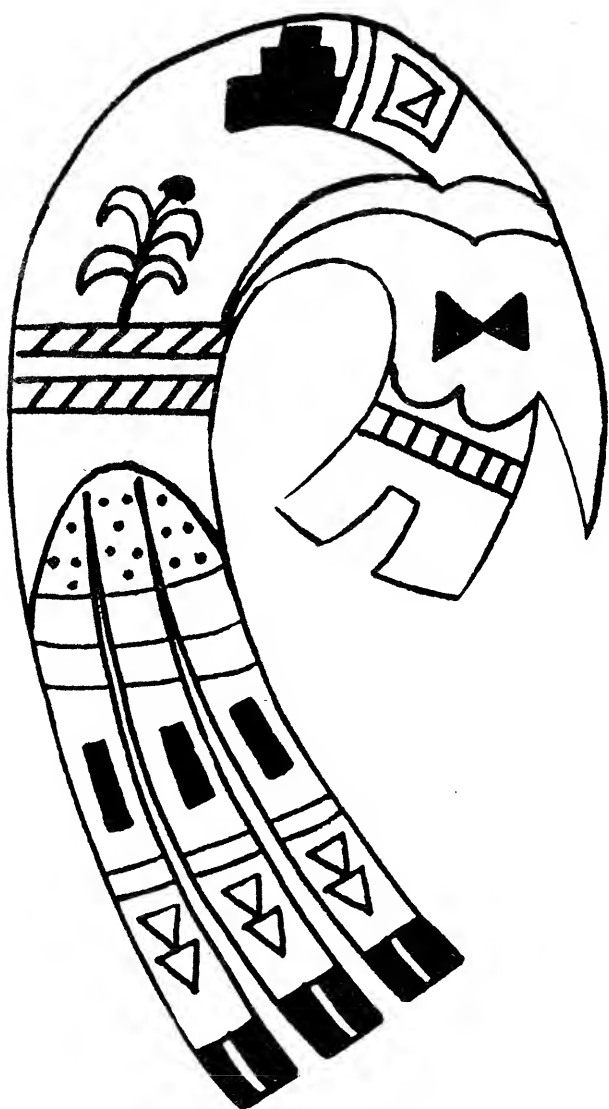
Mrs. Fowler taught me a great deal about living and hoping. For her, hope involved working through feelings about life being unfair, accepting the things she could not change and maintaining courage to face these realities.

Carol J. Farran, Oak Park, Illinois

...On Ageism and Sexism

For ten years now, I have been in the field of gerontology. I am currently working on a PhD thesis which addresses neuropsychological aspects of senile dementia of the Alzheimer's type ("senility"). I am particularly interested in psychological treatment of senile dementia.

As I look at gerontology from a Mennonite perspective, a number of questions come to mind. Are aging processes of Mennnites different from those of other religious or cultural groups? Is there anything unique about the way Mennonites experience their faith across the life span? How does the context of the Mennonite church shape its members' experiences of and attitudes toward aging? Do Mennonites relate to their infirm members in any special way?



"Hope is essential. It determines how persons deal with their life situations," says Carol J. Farran. (This "Rainbow of Hope" is from *Hopi Mission School News*, Kykotsmovi, Arizona.)

I would love to see Mennonites examine these questions in depth. In such examinations, I believe we would be surprised to find how unique we Mennonites really are. Yet at the same time, we would be saddened to see how little we take advantage of our uniqueness to foster particularly healthy aging among our membership.

The discrimination against older people which is evident in society at large is likewise evident in the Mennonite church. This can be seen, for example, in our lowered expectations for older people, our ignorance of growth in particular abilities, and our assumptions regarding appropriate emotions in middle and late adulthood.

I believe women can make a particularly useful contribution to the work of recreating in church and society positive images and assumptions regarding aging. The similarities between "aging issues" and "women's issues" are striking.

Women have experience in consciousness-raising, routing out roots of oppression, identifying content and types of discrimination, and in confronting the pain and stress of recreating new images for themselves; these are valuable assets in the struggle against "ageism."

An interesting twist in *this* struggle is that while only some of us are female, *all* of us are aging individuals! We all have opportunities to experience for ourselves the various roles that power and the lack of it allow us. The fact that aging is a lifelong process—not a stage nor a state of being—is also significant. Perhaps the first step women can take is to examine the role that ageism plays in their own experience of sexism.

Shelly Weaverdyck, Toronto, Ontario

Epilogue

*I have learned how faces fall to bone
how under eyelids terror lurks,
how suffering inscribes on cheeks
the hard lines of its cuneiform texts,
how glossy black or ash-fair locks
turn overnight to tarnished silver
how smiles fade on submissive lips,
and fear quavers in a dry titter. . . .*

Anna Akhmatova, 1888-1965
From *Poems of Akhmatova* (Little, Brown, 1967)

Resources: A Selection

"Aging and Old Age" by Ruth Naylor. A thematic unit created for the teaching of literature, grades 11 and 12. Available from Inter-Mennonite Council on Aging, Box 347, 722 Main St., Newton, KS 67114.

Empowering Ministry in an Ageist Society, Report of a Princeton Symposium (Maggie Kuhns, Carrol Estes, Richard Schaefer, et. al.), 1981, 93 pp., \$1.50. Order from Presbyterian Office on Aging, 341 Ponce deLeon Ave. NE, Atlanta, GA 30365. Good on understanding ageism, justice, church roles and intergenerational possibilities.

Growing Older, Getting Better, A Handbook for Women in the Second Half of Life by Jane Porcino (Addison-Wesley, Reading, MA 01867, \$8.95 paper, \$17.95 hc). Provides informed, compassionate advice on coping with menopause, depression, arthritis, osteoporosis, high blood pressure and other physical and emotional changes of mid and later life.

Hot Flash, quarterly newsletter for midlife and older women; subscription USA \$10, outside USA \$15. School of Allied Health Professions, Health Sciences Center, SUNY, Stony Brook, NY 11794.

Looking Ahead: A Woman's Guide to the Problems and Joys of Growing Older, ed. Lillian Troll, Joan

Israel, Kenneth Israel, 1977, 213 pages, \$3.95. Deals with dilemmas of transition, trail blazing, ignorance and uncertainty, discovery. Presents information and guidelines that may help women broaden their perspective and enhance their lives. Order from **Daughters of Sarah**, 2176 W. Cortland, Chicago, IL 60647. Add \$1 for postage.

New Directions for Women, bi-monthly newsletter since 1972. Subscription \$10/year individual; \$16/year institution. 223 Old Hook Road, Westwood, NJ 97675.

Older Women: The Economics of Aging, a report designed to help older women in problems of U.S. federal policy and programs. Send \$.88 in stamps to Women's Research and Education Institute of the Congresswomen's Caucus, 204 4th Street SE, Washington, DC 20003.

Teaching Concepts of Aging to Young People (Kindergarten-Grade 12), a Handbook for Teachers. Marion G. Marshall, 8210 Varna Ave., Van Nuys, CA 91402.

"Youth Gets a New Image of Aging," Michael Briley and Douglas Jones, **Modern Maturity**, December 1982-January 1983, pp 56-57. 215 Long Beach Blvd., Long Beach, CA 90801.



News and Verbs

Evelyn Godshall Nice, Durham, NC, has recently completed a three-year Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) program at Duke University Medical Center. Evelyn, also an RN, works together with her husband **Frank** in ministry at Durham Mennonite Church; her commission is "co-counselor." **Frank** writes: "We trust the day will soon come that everyone's gifts will be fully and freely enjoyed in all our churches."

Kathryn Klassen Neufeld, Fresno, CA, completed her doctoral studies in Counseling Psychology at University of Southern California this summer. Her dissertation focused on "Phenomenological Case Studies of Bulimia." **Kathryn** is president and therapist with Life Choices, Inc., counseling and educational services in Fresno. She was a featured speaker at a Southwest Evangelical Women's Caucus seminar on "Female and Male in the Image of God" in Pasadena on October 15.

Ron Kennel, pastor of Wellman (Iowa) Mennonite Church, has prepared a paper entitled "Women: Their Gifts and Ministries: A Look at the Bible" for use in an elective Sunday school class on gifts discernment.

Hope House—a service for battered women—opened October 1 in St. Mary Parish, LA, through the efforts of MCC worker **Elizabeth Richmond**. The volunteer workers answer a 24-hour crisis line, transport women to "safe homes" (private residences with occupants

trained to care for battered women and children), and provide counseling, material help and legal planning. Hope House is the first center of its kind in the area.

The Women's Coalition to Stop U.S. Intervention in Central America and the Caribbean is working to: 1) unite women of North America with women of Central America in their struggle for liberation; 2) stop U.S.-backed intervention in Central America; 3) stop U.S. covert operations and other destabilization activities against Nicaragua; and 4) support negotiated solutions in El Salvador with all parties involved in the conflict. For more info, write to: **Sister Marjorie Tuite**, Room 812, 475 Riverside Drive, New York, NY 10115.

"Pocket posters" for sharing the *Report* with others are still available from the MCC Akron office. Appropriate for church or school libraries, bulletin boards, MCC SELFHELP or thrift shops, offices, bookstores, etc. Also available are bulk copies of the July-August 1983 issue of *Report*—Ten-Year Celebration of the Committee on Women's Concerns.

If you have news and verbs that you would like to share with the other 2,000 readers of *Report*, send them to Sue Clemmer Steiner, Apt. 3, 87 Westmount Rd. North, Waterloo, Ontario N2L 5G5 Canada.

A 17th-Century Nun's Prayer

Lord, Thou knowest better than I know myself that I am growing older and will someday be old. Keep me from the fatal habit of thinking I must say something on every subject and on every occasion. Release me from craving to straighten out everybody's affairs. Make me thoughtful but not moody; helpful but not bossy. With my vast store of wisdom, it seems a pity not to use it all, but Thou knowest Lord that I want a few friends at the end.

Keep my mind free from the recital of endless details; give me wings to get to the point. Seal my lips on my aches and pains. They are increasing, and love of rehearsing them is becoming sweeter as the years go by. I dare not ask for grace enough to enjoy the tales of others' pains, but help me to endure them with patience.

I dare not ask for improved memory, but for a growing humility and a lessening cocksureness when my memory seems to clash with the memories of others. Teach me the glorious lesson that occasionally I may be mistaken.

Keep me reasonably sweet; I do not want to be a saint—some of them are so hard to live with, but a sour old person is one of the crowning works of the devil. Give me the ability to see good things in unexpected places and talents in unexpected people. And, give me, Lord, the grace to tell them so. Amen.—*submitted by Thelma Miller Groff*

If you would like to receive Report on a regular basis (6 issues per year), please print your name, address and zip/postal code in the blank space at the bottom of this page and send it to MCC—Report, Akron, PA 17501. No subscription fee, but a \$5 contribution is welcomed.

Letter

I wish to make further comments on Phoebe as *prostatis*, in response to Dan Bumstead's letter in the September-October issue.

He has a point in cautioning about how much we make of Greek word families and derivations which are sometimes debatable. He challenges some linkages I made between the verb *protasso* and the noun *prostatis*, based mainly on non-biblical usage (*Women and the Word* issue, May-June 1983).

My lexical source is *A Greek-English Lexicon* compiled by H.G. Liddell and Robert Scott, Oxford UP, rev. ed. See pages 1526-27 for listings on *prostas*, *protasso* and *prostateta* for a fuller background of the observations I made.

More directly, *prostatis* links with the verb *prohistemi*, which means literally "to stand before, or in front of," hence one who presides. NT usage of cognates is illustrated in Rom. 12:8, 1 Thess. 5:12, 1 Tim. 3:4-5 and 5:17.

That Paul should recognize Phoebe as a *prostatis* is not surprising to me if we understand the nature of servant leadership in the context of biblical mutuality (Eph. 5:21).

Yours for clearer understanding of God's Word,

Erland Waltner, Professor of English Bible, AMBS, Elkhart, IN.

Forthcoming Reports will focus on:
Jan.-Feb. 1984 Women and Home Missions
March-Apr. 1984 Women and Third World Development
May-June 1984 Impact of Childbearing/Childlessness on Women's Lives

The REPORT is published bi-monthly by the MCC Committee on Women's Concerns. The committee, formed in 1973, believes that Jesus Christ teaches equality of all persons. It strives to promote this belief through sharing information, concerns and ideas relating to problems and issues which affect the status of women in church and society. Correspondence should be addressed to Editor Sue Clemmer Steiner, Apt. 3, 87 Westmount Rd. North, Waterloo, Ontario N2L 5G5 Canada.

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